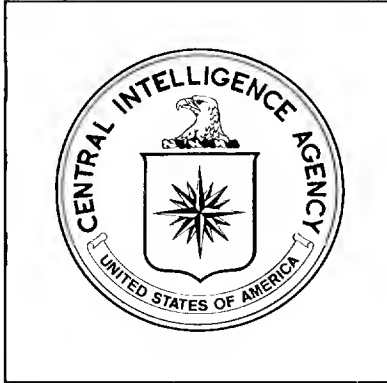


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140

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MIDDLE EAST – AFRICA – SOUTH ASIA

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C O N T E N T S

Nigeria: Obasanjo Speaks Out	1
Nigeria: Post-Coup Purge Accelerating	3

Aug 27, 1975

~~SECRET~~

Nigeria

Obasanjo Speaks Out

Brigadier Obasanjo, the new armed forces chief of staff and the number-two man in government, recently held his first press conference. He used the occasion to outline his views on how the new regime intends to handle the domestic situation. He responded to a question on the military's attitude on returning Nigeria to civilian rule by strongly implying that Head of State Brigadier Muhammed will address the subject in his next major speech.

According to Obasanjo, the regime will strive for openness, avoid self-glorification, and try to be responsive to the needs of the people. Its economic, social, and political programs will be implemented as swiftly as possible and in a "military manner." He told newsmen that the press has a role to play in moulding public support for the government's actions, but cautioned against sensationalizing sensitive national issues.

The day before the press conference, Chief Obafemi Awolowo--Nigeria's best known civilian politician--issued a lengthy statement calling for a return to civilian government by early 1977 and for lifting--by October--the ban on political activities that has been in force for nine years. Since the coup, the press, student groups, and ex-politicians have been clamoring for the new government to set a firm schedule for returning Nigeria to civilian rule.

25X1C [REDACTED] Brigadier Muhammed will present a five-stage program on October 1--Nigeria's independence day--for the eventual return of Nigeria to civilian rule. The program will reportedly provide guidelines for the steps that must be taken before a transfer of

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Aug 27, 1975

1

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power can be considered and does not envision any early lifting of the ban on political activity. The Supreme Military Council reportedly has approved the principle of a return to civilian rule without setting any target date.

In 1970, General Gowon announced a nine-point program as the prerequisite for a return to civilian rule by 1976. He reneged on the program last October, claiming it was necessary to avoid a return to the divisive tribal politics that contributed to two military coups in 1966 and the outbreak of civil war a year later. (SECRET NO FOREIGN DISSEM/NO DISSEM ABROAD/BACKGROUND USE ONLY/CONTROLLED DISSEM)

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Aug 27, 1975

2

SECRET

Nigeria

Post-Coup Purge Accelerating

The new military government's efforts to disassociate itself from the Gowon regime has taken on the form of a purge, causing growing anxiety among holdovers in office. Should the purge go too far, the drain of badly needed expertise could hamper government operations and hinder the implementation of Nigeria's ambitious development plan. The regime also risks creating a large, potentially troublesome group of disgruntled ex-officials. Several hundred state bureaucrats have been dismissed already, along with Nigeria's chief justice, three other federal judges, and nine senior ambassadors.

In the security forces at least five more senior army officers in staff posts and a total of 94 top police officers have been retired on pension since the recent coup. The defense commissioner has said that further retirements can be expected. He has also indicated that the demobilization of at least some members of the armed forces is being considered and that a rehabilitation center is being readied in Lagos to retrain some junior officers for useful civilian jobs. It seems unlikely, however, that any significant reduction is being contemplated in Nigeria's 257,000-man army. Such a move, would most likely create serious political and social problems for the regime.

In an effort to appear active in combatting corruption, the regime has ordered former state governors, ministerial commissioners, and some recently retired army and police officers to declare their financial assets. The government appears to have rejected demands by the press for a public probe of corruption in favor of a more manageable, behind-the-scenes investigation of the alleged activity of these individuals. Press reports have claimed that large sums are missing from several state treasuries, particularly in the east central state. (CONFIDENTIAL)

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Aug 27, 1975

3

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